

# cocoa, smiles and small talk

*Fighting through SCUDs, mortars and opposing forces, Kunsan shirts try to keep defenders', ready augmentees' morale high in exercises.*

**By Master Sgt. Will Ackerman  
8th Fighter Wing Public Affairs**

On a dark, cold evening where the temperature is only about 25 degrees, two airmen stand with M-16s in-hand ready to defend their defensive fighting position (DFP) against enemy forces. Their only source of warmth is a small kerosene heater that sits inside a bunker made of sandbags and wood, and an occasional warm Meal, Ready to Eat, or MRE.

Often located at remote locations of Kunsan Air Base, these airmen stand ready at the DFPs for 12-14 hours during combat readiness exercises. The cold and boredom can become tedious for these warriors. Although they are ready to defend the base at any cost, a hot drink and warm smile are welcome company, if only for a few minutes.

Although not an official duty during exercises, Kunsan's first sergeants reach out to warm the spirits of the airmen who spend long days and nights at the DFPs.

"These people have it the hardest of anybody on the base (during exercises)," said Senior Master Sgt. Bob Madigan, 8th Services Squadron first sergeant. "I don't even deliver cookies to my own people working in the facilities; they have refrigerators, bathrooms and microwave ovens where they work. I go around and visit them, but these are the folks we go out and visit, or try to anyway."

The first sergeants are armed with goodies, such as a 5-gallon jug of hot chocolate, about 10 bags of cookies and sometimes soup. The O'Malley Dining facility staff puts the soup into a big metal container, and then the first sergeants take a ladle out and serve it into Styrofoam cups to the airmen.

"We couldn't do this without the O'Malley's help," Madigan said.

The chapel provides money for the goodies.

When the first sergeants travel out in their vehicles to DFPs, sometimes they encounter anxious defenders.

"We yell out 'cookie patrol' so they know we are not (opposing forces)," Madigan said. "They are not expecting us at the DFPs, so they are a little bit apprehensive, a little trigger happy. Some of them haven't seen anyone for hours and hours, or maybe days and days, so they want to shoot at

something."

At about 7 p.m., tonight's visits begin at several DFPs around building 1305, 8th Fighter Wing headquarters.

"Would you guys like some hot chocolate? We made it in the kitchen just now," said Master Sgt. Gene Baumert, 8th Supply Squadron first sergeant.

Several airmen cautiously exit from a DFP and a nearby humvee to see what is being offered.

"What would you like? Cookies? Cake? Jolly Ranchers?" said Master Sgt. Doris Cousin, 8th Medical Group acting first sergeant.

After sipping the hot chocolate, an 8th Security Forces Squadron airman expresses her gratitude to the first sergeants.

"Thank you very much. I love it. This is fabulous," said Airman 1st Class Kristina Mohnkern. "It's the first hot thing in three days."

Baumert said along with the warm drinks, cookies and candy, it's the human social contact that helps the airmen at the remote DFPs during long duty shifts.

"It's someone stopping by to let them know we haven't forgot about them. It's a little company and small talk," he explained.

During a stop at a mortar pit in a field on the flightline, a security forces airman explained the importance of the visits.

"Hot cocoa helps. It warms up your body, and it makes time go a little bit faster. From here on, (my body) will take a couple of more hours to get cold again," said Staff Sgt. Jason Ford. "It's great to have people come out to say hi. You can only talk about the same things for so long with the same people."

During exercises, getting out to visit the airmen is a daunting task between mortar and SCUD attacks, Bugle Calls and the other events that occur, Madigan said. However, the first sergeants persevere because the airmen are important to them, he explained.

Taking care of the airmen who defend Kunsan Air Base is job number one for first sergeants. Madigan said it's important for the airmen to know there are people who care about them.

"It's our job. We wouldn't have become first sergeants unless we had a desire to take care of people."

**Top: Airman 1st Class Jim Raimondi and Senior Airman Jesse Carter, 8th Security Forces Squadron fire team 2, take cookies from Master Sgt. Doris Cousin, 8th Medical Group first sergeant, at a defensive fighting position Jan. 25 during Kunsan's combat readiness exercise.**

**Far left: Master Sgt. Doris Cousin, 8th Medical Group acting first sergeant, and Senior Master Sergeant Bob Madigan, 8th Services Squadron first sergeant, make up a batch of hot chocolate to take out to airmen manning defensive fighting positions Jan. 25 during Kunsan's combat readiness exercise.**

**Left: Senior Airman Renee Tice, 8th Comptroller Flight, and ready augmentee, enjoys hot cocoa inside her defensive fighting position Jan. 25.**

**Amn Jill Fitzgerald, 8th Supply Squadron, and ready augmentee, gets hot cocoa from her first sergeant, Master Sgt. Gene Baumert, Jan. 25. Fitzgerald was manning a defensive fighting position during the exercise Jan. 22-26.**